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MASTER AND MAN

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BY

COUNT LEO TOLSTOI

73310

TRANSLATED BY

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MASTER AND MAN.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the seventies, the day after the winter *fête* of St. Nicolas. There was holiday in the parish, and Vassili Andreïtch Brekhunoff, merchant of the second guild, could not keep out of it. He had to be in church, for he was churchwarden, and in his own house he was obliged to receive and entertain his relations and friends. But now the last guests had gone, and Vassili Andreïtch was preparing to start immediately to a neighbouring proprietor to complete the purchase of a wood he had already long since bargained for. The young squire had asked ten thou-

and roubles, for the wood, for no other reason than that Vassili had offered seven. Seven thousand was about a third of the real value of the timber. Vassili Andreïtch might possibly have beaten him down still more, as the wood was in his district, and he had come to an agreement ages ago with the other buyers of his circumscription that no merchant should ever raise the price on an offer made by a man in his own district. But Vassili had learnt that the buyers from the country town had an eye on the Goriatchinsky Wood, and therefore he had resolved to go at once and clinch the bargain with the Squire. And this was why, as soon as the merry-making was finished, he had taken seven hundred roubles out of his box, added thereto two thousand three hundred of the church money which he had by him, and carefully counting them over and depositing them in his pocket-book, was preparing to start.

The henchman Nikita was the only sober man that day amongst the hands of Vassili, and was putting the pony to. Nikita was not drunk on that day, because he had been on a drinking bout, and now, since the last day of eating meat, before which he had drunk the shirt off his back, and the shoes off his feet, he had sworn off drink and had not tasted spirits for more than a month. Nor did he indulge now, in spite of the temptation of wine flowing on all sides during the first two days of the holiday.

Nikita was a peasant of fifty years of age from a neighbouring hamlet; no "housekeeper," as they used to say of him, passing most of his life not at home but in service. He was highly esteemed everywhere for his smartness, industry, and working capacity, and especially for his good and pleasant character; but he never stayed long in a place, because once or twice a year, perhaps

oftener, he would begin drinking, and then not only did he drink himself destitute, but he became uproarious and disagreeable. Vassili Andreïtch had already dismissed him more than once, but had taken him on again for the sake of his honesty, his love of dumb animals, and above all his cheapness. He paid him not the eighty roubles which a workman of Nikita's stamp was well worth, but forty only, which he used to dole out to him in small change, partly in coin but more in provisions from his store at a high price.

Nikita's wife, Martha, once a handsome lively woman, kept house with a grown-up son and two little girls. She did not take Nikita to live with them, firstly, because for the last twenty years she had lived with a cooper from another village; and secondly, though she did what she liked with Nikita when he was sober, she feared him like a fire when in his cups. Once, having got very drunk

at home; Nikita, probably in order to counterbalance his weakness when sober, broke open Martha's linen chest, took out all her most precious belongings, and with his axe chopped up her best dresses, petticoats, aprons and all the rest, into rags and ribbons. All the wages he earned were paid over to Martha, and he made no objection. So now, two days before the feast, Martha had been to Vassili and taken from him white flour, tea, coffee, and a quarter of a gallon of wine, the whole mounting to three roubles worth, plus five roubles in coin, for which she had thanked Vassili as if he had done her a favour, whereas in reality he owed Nikita at least twenty roubles.

"Did I make any contract with you?" Vassili would say to Nikita. "If you want anything, take it, and earn it. I don't work like most of them—contracts, counting up wages and fines! We work on honour!

You serve me, and I look after you!" And when he talked like this Vassili Andreïtch was honestly convinced that he was conferring a favour on Nikita, and so confidently did he speak that everybody else, beginning from Nikita himself, upheld him in his belief. "Yes, I understand, Vassili Andreïtch, it seems to me that I do my work, I strive my best as if it were for my own father, I understand perfectly well," Nikita would answer, understanding in fact that Vassili Andreïtch was cheating him, but at the same time feeling that it was no good attempting to square accounts, and that until he found another place he must go on living and taking what he could get.

Now having received his master's orders to harness the sledge, Nikita, as usual merrily and willingly, went off to the stable with the lusty but light stride of his waddling legs. Taking down the reins and tasselled headstall from

the nail, he polished up the bit with a wisp of dried primroses, and opened the stable where stood the pony Vassili had ordered.

"What ho! Lonely are you—lonely, my little fool!" answered Nikita in response to the low welcoming whinny of "Mukhorty," a middle-sized, nimble-looking brown pony with somewhat sloping quarters, who stood by himself. "*Nu! Nu!* first let me give you a drink, you duffer," said he, speaking to the animal just as he would to somebody who understood every word, and after slipping the halter over the handsome little head, he stroked his ears and mane and led him out to water. Stepping gingerly over the deeply dung-strewn stable, "Mukhorty" began to play and lunge out, making as if he meant to kick Nikita trotting before him to the well.

"Go on, go on, you rascal!" cried Nikita, knowing well how carefully "Mukhorty"

judged his distance so as only to touch his coat with his hoofs, and not to strike him, a game he was very fond of. Having drunk his fill of cold water the pony stood still, shaking his strong wet lips, from which the crystal drops fell down along his muzzle into the pail, and then gave a snort.

"Don't want any more? nothing else? all right, we know now, and don't ask for more later on," said Nikita, talking perfectly seriously to "Mukhorty." Then he ran back to the stable to get the sledge, dragging behind him the lively, frisky young pony.

There were none of the workmen about, only a stranger who had come for the holiday, the husband of the cook.

"Go in and ask, my dear soul," said Nikita to him, "which sledge I am to take, the half-covered one, or the lightest?"

The man disappeared into the house, and quickly returned to say that it was the light

sledge. Nikita, meanwhile, had fixed on the collar, and leading the pony with one hand and holding a small, painted yoke in the other, he went up to where the two sledges were lying.

"The light one! So be it, the light one, then," he repeated, putting the pony into the shafts, whilst "Mukhorty" continued his play, and pretended to bite him.

"That's all right, *nu*, *nu*, don't be in a hurry," said Nikita, arranging in the bottom of the sledge the fresh barley straw brought to him by the cook's husband. "Now give us the horse-cloth,* so! And on top the sack, so! Like that the master will sit comfortably," and he patted down the sack and pulled up the straw all round it.

"Thanks, dear soul," to the cook's husband,

* The "deryoojka" and "veretieh" are two kinds of rough sacking used to cover the straw and hay, and so make a seat, in sledges. Sometimes they are merely thrown over it, and sometimes a loose bag is made, and stuffed.

the reins he seated himself on the edge of the sledge, shook up the pony, and went across the frozen yard out of the gate.

"Uncle Mikit, uncle Mikit! ah, uncle!" shouted out the seven-year-old little son of Vassili, rattling the latch, and rushing out into the yard in a black coat, new white felt boots, and a warm cap. "Take me in!" he cried in his shrill voice, unbuttoning his coat as he ran.

"*Nu, nu!* run, my doveling!" and Nikita pulled up, took in his master's boy radiant with delight, and drove out into the road.

It was three o'clock, and freezing hard, ten degrees Réaumur, cloudy and windy. But in the yard it seemed still, whilst outside a strong wind was blowing; from the roof of the stable the snow was driving and drifting up in the corner against the bath-house. Nikita turned the sledge up to the doorstep

just as Vassili, with a cigarette between his lips, wrapped in a *touloop* lined with sheepskin, tightly and closely bound round him with a scarf, came out on to the trampled snow, and stood for a moment, turning up the collar of his coat, and arranging it round his scarlet face, clean-shaved except for the moustache, so that the fur should not get wet with his breath.

"So you are already here, you monkey!" he remarked, espying his son in the sledge showing all his white teeth. Vassili was somewhat merry with the wine drunk in company with his guests, and consequently he was more than usually pleased with everything that belonged to him, and all that he had made.

With her head and shoulders smothered in a woollen shawl, so that only her eyes were visible, Vassili's wife, a pale thin woman in an interesting condition, stood in the hall to see him off.

Really you ought to take Nikita," she said timidly, standing back from the door.

Vassili Andreïtch answered nothing but only spat.

"You have money with you," continued his wife in the same complaining voice. "Ay! and the weather is none too good. Really you should, in God's name!"

"What's the matter with me? Don't I know the road, that I need somebody to ride with me?" remarked Vassili with that unnatural tightening of the lips with which he usually addressed sellers and buyers, evidently pleased with his own speech.

"Really, you ought to take him. I beg you, for God's sake, do!" repeated the woman, twisting her shawl over to the other side.

"Bother! she is as bad as a bath leaf.* How can I take him?"

* "Like a bath leaf." In Russian baths there is always a stock of birch twigs dried with the leaves on. In city baths

"I am quite ready," cheerfully retorted Nikita; "only be sure and feed the horses without me," he added, turning to the wife.

"I will see to them, Nikitushka. I will tell Simeon," answered she.

"Well, am I to come then, Vassili Andreïtch?" said Nikita, waiting.

"To give pleasure to the old woman! Only put on a warmer diplomat,"* replied Vassili, smiling again and winking at the overcoat Nikita had on, split under the arms and in the back, in holes here and patched there, turned and darned over every inch of it.

"Eh, dear soul, come and hold the pony a bit," shouted Nikita to the cook's husband.

"I will hold him myself," cried the little

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these are generally laid under the head or shoulders whilst the bather is being scrubbed; but in villages, in the vapour baths, they are used as in public schools, and the leaves stick pertinaciously to the damp skin. Hence the proverb.

* A "diplomat" is a country term for any fine coat, since probably the first garments of fashionable cut seen in the villages were worn by foreign diplomats when out shooting.

boy, taking his red cold hands out of his pockets, and laying hold of the frozen reins.

"Only do not turn yourself too finely, look alive," said Vassili, mocking at the retreating form of Nikita.

"One second, little father Vassili Andreïtch," and slipping his socks into his patched and greasy valinky (long felt boots) Nikita ran across the yard to the workman's shed.

"*Nu*, Arenushka! Give me my long coat off the stove; I have to go with the master," as he took down his girdle off the nail.

The cook, who had been asleep after dinner, and had now waked up and set the samovar to boil for her husband, met Nikita good-humouredly, and infected with his hurry, quickly got his coat, a wretched old cloth affair, off the stove where it had been drying, and helped him on with it. Having tied himself well in—

"That's all right," he remarked, speaking not to the woman, but to the girdle as he tucked the two ends in at the waist. "That's not too high!" and he lifted his shoulders and stretched himself so as to have his arms quite free, picked up his gloves, and was ready.

"You, Nikita, you ought to have arranged your feet better! Your boots are rotten!"

Nikita stood a minute as if thinking.

"Yes, I ought. But I shall do as I am. It is not far," and he ran out into the yard.

"Won't you be cold, Nikitushka?" said his mistress as he sat in the sledge.

"Cold! I am as warm as a toast," answered Nikita, arranging the straw in the sledge so as to cover his feet, and slipping the whip which was not needed for the willing pony under the seat.

Vassili had already taken his place, filling

up almost the whole of the back of the sledge with his broad back enveloped in two huge fur coats, and picking up the reins, he started the pony. Nikita sat astride the seat in front on the left side, and dangled one of his feet outside.

CHAPTER II.

THE good horse started off at a smart pace down the frozen, beaten track through the village, the snow singing under the runners.

"What are you hanging on to? Hand over the whip, Nikita," shouted Vassili Andreïtch, evidently very pleased with his son who had straddled the runners behind. "I'll give it you. Get back to your mother, you young whelp!"

The lad jumped off. "Mukhorty" increased his amble, and broke into a trot. Kresty, the hamlet in which stood Vassili's home, consisted of six houses. They had barely passed the last cottage, belonging to

the blacksmith, ere they found that the wind was far stronger than they had thought. The track was already hardly distinguishable. The marks of the runners were instantly covered, and one could only make out the road from its being slightly higher than the surrounding surface. Over the whole plain spread, as it were, a veil of smoke, and it was impossible to see the sky-line.

The Telyatin Wood, always plainly visible, loomed dimly through the driving snow-mist. The gale was blowing from the left, turning back the mane from "Mukhorty's" hard-bitten neck, and also forcing round his knotted tail, whilst it kept Nikita's long collar tight glued against his face and nose.

"He can't trot out properly, too much snow," remarked Vassili, proud of his good horse. "I once drove to Pashutino with him in half-an-hour."

"Eh?"

"I say I drove to Pashutino in half-an-hour!"

"What of that? The horse is a good one," muttered Nikita.

They relapsed into silence, but Vassili wanted to talk.

"Heh! I have told the mistress not to give the cooper anything to drink," he said, being so sure that Nikita must be delighted to chat with such a famous and enlightened individual as he, and so delighted at his own joke that it never entered his head that such a subject of conversation might not be pleasant to Nikita.

Again, however, the latter failed to hear his master's words, borne away on the wind. Vassili repeated his joke about the cooper in his loud, distinct voice.

"God be with them, Vassili Andreïtch. I do not meddle in these things. She has

never done me the slightest wrong, and God be with her."

"That is so! But how now? Are you not going to buy a horse in the spring?" said Vassili, in order to open a new subject of conversation.

"Yes—no fault of mine," answered Nikita, turning down his collar, and slewing round towards his master. Now it began to interest him, and he wanted to hear everything.

"My son is growing up, and must plough for himself next year. Up to now he has always been hired."

"Take the Bezkostrechny.* I won't ask much for him," shouted Vassili, getting quite excited at falling upon a question of profit, his darling hobby, which occupied all his existence.

* "Bezkostrechny" is one of those untranslateable names the Russian loves to bestow on his horse. It means that he has some peculiarity in his colour, coat, or anatomy. "Mukhorty," one of the heroes of the present tale, is another example of this nomenclature.

"Sell him for fifteen roubles, and I can buy him," shouted back Nikita, knowing that the horse Vassili offered was worth seven roubles at the outside, and, moreover, that if he sold it to him he would reckon it at twenty-five, and then he would not see the colour of his wages for half a year.

"The horse is a good one! I act by you, though, as I would by myself. On my conscience, Brekhunoff does no man wrong. Rather let *me* lose, and not others. On my honour," he yelled in his usual bargaining voice, "the horse is a real one!"

"So-so," from Nikita, who sighed, and seeing that there was nothing more to listen to, put up his collar again, covering up his ears.

For half an hour they drove on in silence. The wind blew through and through Nikita's side and arm where his coat was torn. He hugged himself, and breathed into his collar,

shutting his mouth, and it seemed to him that his breath warmed him a little.

"What do you think? Shall we drive through Karamishevo, or straight on?" asked Vassili.

To Karamishevo there was a more frequented road marked out with branches * on both sides, but it was longer. Straight on was shorter, but the track was slightly beaten only, and there were no branch-marks, or very poor meagre ones.

Nikita thought a little. "To Karamishevo the road is better going, even if it is longer," he said at length.

"And straight ahead we need not lose our way," replied Vassili, who wanted to go on.

* I have translated "veshky" as "bushes," "branches," and "road-marks." They are in fact any handy object planted in the snow-wastes between the villages to mark out the tracks, which would be otherwise indistinguishable at night. Military "veshky" are made by tying bundles of straw on stakes, and daubing them with pitch. They can be lighted very quickly.

"As you like," said Nikita, and put up his collar again.

So Vassili Andreïtch drove on, and, after half a verst, turned to the left past a bare oak. After turning, the wind blew almost directly in their faces, and a fine snow began to fall. Vassili blew out his cheeks and breathed down into his moustache. Nikita shivered. So they went on for ten minutes without a word, till Vassili said something.

"What?"

Vassili did not answer, but screwed himself about, looking in front and behind. The pony, his coat curling with sweat, dropped into a walk.

"What is it, I say?" repeated Nikita.

"What! what?" growled Vassili angrily. "Can't see any branches, must have lost the track."

"Then pull up, and I will have a look," said Nikita, and lightly springing out of the

sledge, and picking up the whip from under the straw, he started off to the left. That year the snow was not deep, so that one could drive anywhere nevertheless, here and there it was up to the knee, and filled Nikita's boots.

Nikita went on stirring about with his feet and the whip handle, but no road was to be found.

"Well, what now?" said Vassili, when Nikita returned.

"On that side there is no road. We must go to the other side."

"There is something black in front there; go and see what it is."

Nikita trudged off to what was black; it was only the earth sown with winter grain, uncovered by the wind. Turning off to the right, Nikita came back to the sledge, and shaking off the snow and emptying it out of his boots, he seated himself.

"We must drive to the right," said he decidedly. "The wind was on my left, and now it is straight in my face, drive to the right."

Vassili obeyed, and to the right they went. But still there was no road. They drove on thus for some time. The gale did not abate, and the snow snowed on.

"We have lost our way altogether, Vassili Andreïtch," broke out Nikita, as if pleased at the fact.

"What is that?" showing an old potato stalk sticking up through the snow. Vassili pulled up the sweating, panting horse. "And what is it?"

"What is it? Why we are in the Zahareffsky field. That's where we have got to!"

"Bosh!" retorted Vassili, speaking quite differently to what he did at home, in regular peasant slang.

"It is not bosh, but truth, I am saying. Why, from the sound of the sledge you could hear we were driving over a potato-field. And here is a pile of old roots. We are in the Zahareffsky field."

"Well! of all places!" said Vassili. "Where are we to go now?"

"Straight ahead, nothing else; we shall come out somewhere. If not at Zaharoffka, then at the home farm."

Vassili agreed, and off they went, for a long time now driving over fields of green stuff bare of snow, where the drifts and the furrows were covered with earth carried to the surface by the blast, now over various other grain-cropped fields, where the stalks poked up through the snow, and again over level, smooth, white expanses. The snow was falling from above and whirling about below. Sometimes it seemed that they were driving uphill, then down, sometimes that they were

standing still and the snow-landscape was flying past them. Neither spoke. The pony was palpably tiring and going at a foot-pace. Suddenly he stumbled and stuck in a ditch or trench. Vassili wished to stop, but Nikita shouted out—

"What are you pulling up for? We have driven in and must drive out! *Nu*, my darling, *nu, nu!*" he cheerfully exhorted the pony, jumping out of the sledge and into the ditch. The good beast made an effort, and hauled them out of what was evidently a hand-made trench.

"Well! where are we now?" said Vassili.

"We shall soon find out," replied Nikita. "We shall come out somewhere!"

"That must be the Goriatchinsky Wood," retorted Vassili, pointing to a dark mass before them.

"Drive up to it, and we shall see what sort of a wood it is.

Nikita had noticed that from the outline of the dark mass protruded long leaves of osier, so he knew it was no wood, but a habitation, but he did not want to say so. And in truth they had not advanced sixty feet out of the ditch before the withes stood out distinctly, and one could hear a plaintive sound. Nikita had guessed rightly; that was no wood, but a row of tall osiers with a few of their leaves still fluttering on the branches. Driving up to the melancholy-sounding osier-bed, the pony suddenly lifted his forefeet higher than the sledge, picked up his hind-legs after him, and was no longer up to his knees in snow. It was the road.

"We have arrived at last," ejaculated Nikita, "but don't know where."

The pony without mistake went along the track, and before long they came to a hedge round a barn. Contouring the barn the road led into a snowdrift, but in front they could

see a passage between two houses, so that it was clear the drift had been blown across the road, and must be driven through. And so it turned out, for, struggling on, they came on to a street,* and at the first house a lot of frozen linen was wretchedly hanging on a line, shirts, red and white, stockings, and petticoats. The white shirts looked especially weird swinging their sleeves.

"The housewife must either be a lazy slut, or else on her deathbed, that she does not take in her washing for the holiday," remarked Nikita, contemplating the fluttering shirts.

* Most Russian villages consist of one long thoroughfare, called by courtesy a street, on both sides of which stand the cottages. As the village grows the street gets longer, but seldom branches out.

CHAPTER III.

At the end of the street there was still a stiff breeze, and the road was overdrifted, but in the middle of the village it was still warm and comfortable. In one house a dog was barking, from another a woman with her head wrapped in a jacket appeared, running out to see who was driving past, and stood on the threshold. From the centre of the cottages came the sound of girls singing, and altogether there appeared to be less frost, wind, and snow in the village.

"Why, this is Grishkino!" said Vassili Andreïtch.

"So it is," from Nikita, and it was Grishkino. It turned out that they had gone too

much to the left, and driven eight versts, not quite in the direction they wished, but all the same had arrived at their destination. To Goriatchkino from Grishkino was five versts more.

Driving through the village street they knocked up against a tall man going down the middle of the road.

"Who's that?" he cried, stopping the horse; and then, recognising Vassili, he laid hold of the shaft with both hands and vaulted on to the edge of the sledge. It was the peasant Isaiah, an acquaintance of Vassili's, well known for miles round as a first-class horse-stealer.

"Eh! Vassili Andreïtch! and where is the good God taking you to?" remarked Isaiah, sending a whiff of vodky-laden breath into Nikita's face.

"We are going to Goriatchkino."

"And here's where you have come to!

You ought to have gone through Malakhovo."

"Ought, but we didn't. We made a mistake," said Vassili, pulling up.

"Pony's a good one," replied Isaiah, eyeing "Mukhorty," and with a familiar movement tightening the knot in his tail which had grown loose. "Are you going to sleep here?"

"No, brother, we are bound to drive on."

"Bound to? And who's that? Ah, Nikita Stepanitch."

"Who else should it be?" answered Nikita. "But look here! don't let us lose our way again."

"Where can you go wrong? Turn round and straight away down the road, and always straight on. Don't go to the left. Then you'll come out on to the high road, and there turn to the left."

"So, after turning out of the high road,

must we take the summer or the winter road?"

"The winter road. Directly you get out of the village you will see bushes, and branches, especially a big gnarled oak branch stands out. That's the place."

Vassili turned the pony's head and let him go.

"You had better stay the night" screeched Isaiah after them, but Vassili did not answer except by urging on the pony. Five versts level road, of which two were through the forest,* seemed a trifle to cover, the more so as the wind appeared to have dropped and the snow to be stopping.

So they drove down the village street, brown with fresh dung and beaten by many feet, and again past the house with the linen where one of the white shirts had torn itself

* A sledge road through a forest is considered the acme of good going as it is sheltered from the wind, which is always cruel across the open, and from drifts.

loose all but one sleeve, and past the plantation of horribly rattling osiers, out into the open plain. There they found that the storm not only had not ceased, but appeared more violent. The track was wiped out, and only the branches kept them from losing it, and it was not easy to see them for the wind which blew direct from the front.

Vassili Andreïtch screwed up his eyes, and shifted his head about to keep a look-out for the roadmarks, but left the pony much to itself, having confidence in the animal; and "Mukhorty" never lost his way, but trotted on, turning right and left along the windings of the road which he felt or smelt under his feet. So that in spite of the snow and the wind growing thicker and stronger they continued to see the bush-marks on either side. So they went for perhaps ten minutes when suddenly in front of them they made out something dark moving on the sloping

surface of the driven snow. It was a sledge with fellow travellers. "Mukhorty" soon caught them up and with his forefeet struck the back of the sledge ahead.

"Get on past us—get on!" they shouted from the other sledge. And Vassili proceeded to drive past. It was plain that the other party had been merrymaking. One peasant was whipping up the horse's quarters with a twig. Two others, clapping their hands, were yelling on the front seat; and a woman, well wrapped up, was sitting at the back like a hen with ruffled feathers, all covered with snow.

"Who are you?" inquired Vassili.

"A-a-a-a-skie," was all that could be heard.

"Who are you, I say?"

Again the same indistinguishable sounds roared forth with all the strength of the peasant's lungs, but inaudible through the blast.

"Drive on! Don't let them pass."

"You have evidently been on the spree."

"Go ahead! Drive on, Simeon, drive past them, get on!"

The sledges banged against each other, with their wings* almost locked, separated again, and the other one was slowly left behind. The hairy pot-bellied little pony, covered with snowflakes and panting under his load, was evidently on his last legs as he struggled gamely through. His muzzle, quite a young one, with elongated under lip like a fish and distended nostrils, kept up for a few seconds level with Nikita's shoulder, his ears laid back with fear, and then he fell behind.

"See what wine does!" remarked Nikita. "They have tortured that poor pony to extinction. What Asiatics!"

* The wings of a rustic sledge are two planks fixed about a foot, or a foot and a half, higher than the runners, and standing out a yard or so from the body. They serve to keep it from upsetting suddenly, as it would otherwise do continually, in driving over obstacles hidden beneath the snow.

For another moment or two they could hea[r] the sobbing nostrils of the unfortunate pon[y] and the drunken yells of the peasants, then the animal sound grew faint and finally the shouts died into silence. And around nothing could be heard but the wind whistling in their ears, and an occasional scrape of the runners on a bare piece of the road.

This little meeting, however, had cheered up Vassili, and he pushed on "Mukhorty" more boldly in full trust without paying much attention to the bush-marks.

Nikita could do nothing but shiver. All at once though, the pony came to a stand, and Nikita was almost pitched out, hanging on only by the skin of his teeth.

"If we haven't gone wrong again!" said Vassili. "Well? Well, I can't see any more branches. We have got off the track."

"If we are off the track, we must look for it, that's all," laconically responded Nikita,

nd he started off through the snow with his hort paces, toes well-turned in. For long he wandered about, disappearing from sight and reappearing, before he returned.

"There is no road here, perhaps it is somewhere ahead," said he, re-seating himself. It was growing much darker, and if the storm was not increasing in fury it certainly was not decreasing.

"If we could only hear those drunken peasants!"

"They haven't caught us up, and that shows we are a long way out of our reckoning. And possibly they have lost themselves too," observed Nikita.

"Where on earth are we to drive to now?"

"Let the pony have his head.* He will bring us out. Hand over the reins."

* Unless the driver knows the road very well he generally leaves the horse to pick it out, and the animal will seldom leave

Vassili gave them up; all the more readily that his hands were beginning to grow numb even through his thick gloves.

Nikita took, but merely held, them, carefully avoiding pulling one or the other, and admiring the intelligence of his dear "Mukhorty," who, turning his ears first one and then the other, to right and left, was slowly slewing round.

"Only don't speak to him. Look what he is doing! Go on, go on, that's right." The wind was now from behind, and it was not so cold.

"Clever beast," continued Nikita in ecstasy. "A Kirghiz pony is strong but stupid. But this one! Just look at him, see what he is doing with his ears. He needs no telegraph. He can tell from a verst off."

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a track quite invisible to the man. It is no uncommon thing to meet single sledges, or whole rows of them, at night, the drivers fast asleep and the ponies trotting gaily along.

And in less than half-an-hour something black actually began to loom out: either a wood, or a village, and on the right hand once more there were bushes. They had evidently fallen on to the road again.

"Why! it's Grishkino again," suddenly cried Nikita.

Now on their left was the same old barn, and further on the same clothes-line with the frozen shirts, drawers, and petticoats which were making the same ghastly music in the wind. And again they drove down the middle street and found it warm and still and comfortable, and heard the dog barking and the girls singing. But it was darker and lights were already in many windows.

Half-way down the street Vassili turned the pony up to a large house and pulled up at the yard-gate.

"Call out for Tarass," he told Nikita, who alighted, and approaching a lit-up casement

across which the crystal snow-flakes were flying like diamonds, he knocked with the handle of his whip.*

"Who's there?" from within, in answer to Nikita's summons.

"From Kresty, the Brekhunoffs, my dear sir," replied Nikita. "Let us in for an hour."

They went away from the window, and in a couple of minutes one could hear the hall door open, then the latch of the outer door, and then the figure of an old peasant with a white beard, a tall cap, coat buttoned over a white holiday shirt, and, standing by him, a young man in a red shirt filled up the entrance.

* It is sufficient to knock at the window at almost any hour, in a Russian village, for the traveller to obtain shelter and refreshment. There is always a light burning in front of the Eikon, and the peasants sleep so much in the daytime that it is no hardship to be roused up at night. I remember once losing the way in a storm and coming upon a cottage in the small hours of the morning. A peasant, whom we knocked up, cheerfully lit a lantern, and turned out to put us on the right road, walking nearly a mile in front of us, and refusing the equivalent of sixpence offered him for his trouble.

"Do us the favour of entering," said the old man.

"You see, brother, we lost our way," explained Vassili, "we wanted to go to Goriatchkino, and see where we got to! we drove back, but lost our way a second time."

"Yes, you certainly went wrong," rejoined the old fellow. "Petrushka, go and open the stable gate," turning to the young man in the red shirt.

"That I can do," he replied in a cheerful voice, and ran back into the passage.

"You know, we aren't going to sleep here," remarked Vassili.

"Why should you go on? It is already night—better sleep here."

"I should like to, but am bound to go on."

"At any rate, come and warm yourself, come straight to the samovar," and the old man led the way.

"Warm ourselves? That is possible," re-

flected Vassili. "It won't grow any dar[redacted] The month is getting on. It is lighter eve[redacted] day. Let us go in and warm ourselv[redacted] Nikita!"

"Why, of course we can warm ourselves," said Nikita, who was mortally cold, and wished for nothing better than to toast his frozen limbs at the stove.

Vassili Andreïtch followed the old man into the cottage, and Nikita drove through the door Petrushka had opened, and by his instructions turned the pony under a shed. The stable was laid thick with dung and a heavy harness hung ready for use over the fowl-house. A number of fowls and a cock roosting on the shelves began crowing and clucking, and the sheep, in terror at the intrusion pattered over the frozen dung and herded in a corner. The dog, howling horribly with fright, began to vent his rage by barking and snarling at the stranger.

Nikita began to talk to them all. He gged the fowls' pardon and calmed them wn, telling them not to be frightened; he eproached the sheep for being alarmed without knowing at what, and he never left off admonishing the dog, whilst tying up his pony.

"Now everything is as it should be," he said shaking the snow off himself. "You have barked well!" he added, addressing the dog, "now shut up, do! That's enough, stupid! Enough! you are only making yourself miserable. We aren't thieves."

"There are three good counsellors for a home as they say," put in the young man leaning a strong hand on the roof of the shed.

"Which counsellors?"

"As they print in Paulsen: a thief tries to get into the house; the dog barks, which means don't yawn, keep your eyes open. The

cock crows, saying, 'Time to get up.' [redacted] cat washes herself, which means, 'A valu[redacted] guest, get ready to receive him,'" repeat[redacted] Petrushka.

He knew how to read and write, and had learnt by heart the only book he had, by Paulsen, and was fond, when he had drunk a little, of quoting extracts which seemed to him appropriate to the occasion.

"That is quite true," said Nikita.

"I am getting cold, old boy," added Petrushka.

"So am I," assented Nikita, and they went through the yard and passage into the cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE house at which Vassili had stopped was one of the richest in the village. The family possessed seven lots,* and some additional land into the bargain. They had six horses, three cows, two heifers and a score of sheep. There were twenty-two souls in the house: four married sons, six grandsons, of whom Petrushka alone was married; two great-grandsons, three orphans and four daughters-in-law with their children. It was one of the few houses which still remain undivided, but even there for some time past had been going on a silent work of undermining which would

* The village communal property is divided into so many portions, each family holding shares proportionate to the number of adult males.

soon bring about a partition. Two sons lived at Moscow in the waterworks, one in the army. At that moment there were at home the old man and the old woman, the eldest son, a son from Moscow who had come for the holiday, and all the women and children. Besides the family the neighbouring village Elder was there as guest.

Over the table hung a lamp with an embroidered shade brightly lighting up the arrangements for tea underneath, a bottle of vodky, cold refreshments, and the brick walls hung with eikons and pictures. The first place at table was occupied by Vassili, in a black coat, sucking his frozen moustache, and casting his prominent hawk's eyes on the people gathered round. Besides Vassili, the bald old host with his white beard, dressed in a homespun white shirt, was at the board; and next to him, in a thin linen shirt, with a healthy broad back and shoulders, was the son

from Moscow; and the eldest son who managed the house, broader still, contrasted with the lean red-haired elder.

The peasants, having eaten and drunk, were just preparing for tea, and the samovar was already hissing on the floor by the stove. On the shelves* and the stove were packed the children, whilst seated on a bedstead with a cradle by her side was a woman. The old housewife, with a face seamed with wrinkles to such an extent that even her teeth seemed wrinkled, was attending to Vassili Andreïtch.

At the moment when Nikita came in from the stable she was pouring out some vodky into a thick glass and offering it to Vassili.

* The stove is the principal furniture of a Russian cottage. It fills a third of the interior of the principal room, being built of brick and plaster, flat on the top. During the day it is used for cooking and for drying clothes, and at night it is the family bed on which all the inmates sleep in a heap, pell-mell. The "polaty" are broad shelves running round the walls, high up. They serve for drying onions and such like, and also afford sleeping accommodation for children and the lighter members of the community.

"Don't be offended, Vassili Andreïtch: you must drink our healths," said the old man. Now the smell of vodky, especially then when he was half dead with cold, troubled Nikita seriously. He frowned, and wiping his cap and coat clean of snow, he went and stood in front of the eikon, as if he saw nobody present, crossed himself thrice and made his prayer, then turning to the old man, his host, he first thanked him, then everybody else sitting at table, and the women round the stove, and wishing them all a happy holiday began to divest himself of his outer garments without looking at the table.

"Well, you are properly frosted over," said the eldest brother, looking at Nikita's face, eyes and beard all damp with snow.

Nikita took off his coat, wiped it again, and hung it up on the stove, before approaching the table. They offered him, too, a glass of vodky. There was a minute of agonising

struggle. He almost took the glass, and lifted the sparkling spirituous temptation to his lips. But he glanced at Vassili, remembered his oath, his boots, the cooper, and his little son to whom he had promised a horse in the spring: he heaved a sigh and refused.

"I don't drink, thank you kindly," said he, frowning, and sat down in the second window.

"What's the meaning of that?" said the elder brother.

"I don't drink, and that's all," replied Nikita, without raising his eyes, and gnawing his beard and moustache to thaw the icicles.

"It does not agree with him," added Vassili, who had just finished his glass.

"Have a cup of tea, then," rejoined the old woman, persuasively.

"What are you women dawdling about the samovar for?"

"It is ready," said one of the young ones,

and fanning the urn which was almost out, she lifted it with difficulty, and thumped it down on the table.

Meanwhile Vassili was recounting how they had lost their way, how they had twice come back to that same village, how they had lost it again, and met the drunken peasants. Their hosts explained where and how they had gone wrong, who the drunken party were whom they had met, and described the road they should have taken.

"Any little boy can drive to Moltchanovka, only you must take the right turning out of the high road; you can see the bushes. And yet you did not get there," said the elder.

"You had better stay the night," suggested the old woman; "the wenches will make the beds."

"You could start in the morning, it is poor work at night," from the host.

"Can't be done, brother; business, busi-

ness!" replied Vassili. "One hour let slip you can't catch up in a year," added he, recalling the wood and the buyers who might outbid him. "Let us go, eh!" to Nikita.

Nikita did not answer for a while, being, as it were, occupied in thawing his beard.

"Suppose we get lost again," he replied gloomily. He was in a bad temper because he dearly wished for vodky, and the only thing which could quench his desire would be tea, and up to now nobody had given him any.

"We have only to go up to the turning, and we can't go wrong. Woods all the rest of the way," said Vassili.

"It's your business, Vassili Andreïtch; if we must, we must," taking at last a glass of tea.

"Let us drink a little tea and then off we go," finally decided Vassili.

Nikita said nothing, but nodded his head,

and carefully poured his tea into the saucer, and warmed his frozen fingers in the steam. Then biting off a little piece of sugar,* he bowed to his host, and wishing them good health, he swallowed the comforting liquid.

"Supposing somebody were to go with us as far as the turning?"

"Why not?" said the eldest son. "Petrushka can drive with you up to the turning."

"Let him get ready then, and I am much obliged to you," replied Vassili.

"What for, dear heart? We are pleased to do so," said the old woman. "Petrushka, go and put to the mare."

"That I can do," said Peter smiling, and snatching his cap from the nail, he ran out. While the horses were being harnessed the

* The peasant fashion of drinking tea, is to bite off a small chip of sugar and keep it in the mouth whilst swallowing the tea. At every railway station boiling water is provided gratis, and the peasant always carries with him a pinch of tea and a piece of sugar, and refreshes himself all along the route.

conversation went back to the point when it had been interrupted by the travellers' knock at the window. The old father was complaining to his neighbour of his third son who had sent him no holiday present, though he had sent a red handkerchief to his wife.

"The young generation is getting out of hand," he said.

"They are indeed," assented the elder, "good for nothing; too clever by half. Look at Demotchkin who broke his father's arm. It all comes of too much knowing."

Nikita listened, looked in the faces round, and evidently wished to take part in the discussion, but he was too absorbed in his tea, and merely wagged his head in approval. He drank glass after glass and felt warmer and warmer, and more and more comfortable. The talk went on always on the same theme, about the division of property, and was not very lively, the subject being about a division

in that very family, a division claimed by the third son, who sat silent and sulky. It was plainly the sore spot, and touched them all closely, but for good manners' sake they did not care to go into their private affairs before strangers. At length, however, the old man could not restrain himself, and with tears in his voice declared that he would never be a party to a division while he lived; that, thank God! the house was his, and if they divided they would all go to the four corners of the earth.

"Like the Matvëeffs," instanced the elder; "it used to be a proper house, and now there are none of them worth anything."

"And that's what you want here," said the old man to his son, who did not answer, and an awkward silence ensued, broken by Petrushka, who had harnessed the mare, and come back to the cottage some minutes before, smiling as usual.

"Paulsen has a fable to that effect. A father gave his sons a bundle of sticks to break, and they could not, except by taking them separately. The same thing," he added, grinning from ear to ear; adding, "All ready!"

"If all's ready, let us be off," said Vassili, "and as for partition, uncle, don't you give in. You have earned the house, you are the master. Take the case to the Court, it will set all straight."

"Always quarrelling, always quarrelling," in the whining tones of the old man, "there is no peace for them; just like devils."

Nikita, meanwhile, having finished his fifth glass of tea, had nevertheless not turned it upside down,* but merely put it on one side, hoping to get a sixth. But there was no more water left in the samovar, and the hostess did

* When one has had enough, it is etiquette to turn the glass (tea is never drunk out of cups in Russia) upside down in the saucer.

not offer him any, whilst Vassili was beginning to dress. There was nothing for it but to get up too, so he put back in the sugar-basin his piece of sugar, gnawed all round, wiped the sweat off his face with the napkin, and went to put on his coat.

Having got into it, he sighed, thanked and took leave of his hosts, and went out of the warm bright room into the dark, cold passage, alive with the whistling of the wind forcing the snow through the cracks in the doors, and so into the yard.

Petrushka was standing in his coat by the mare in the middle of the yard, and was reciting verses out of Paulsen: "The storm covers the sky with its veil, the whirlwind plays with the snow, now howling like a beast, now 'plaining like a child."

Nikita approvingly nodded, and sorted his reins.

The old man accompanying Vassili with a

lantern into the passage tried to light him on his way, but the lantern was blown out in a twinkling. Even in the yard you could see that the storm had increased.

"*Nu!* here's weather for you," thought Vassili. "Supposing we were not to start. But no! business is business! and everything is ready; the host's mare is harnessed. Let us be off, and God be with us!"

The old man also thought it better to wait, but he had said so before, and they had not listened to him. "Perhaps it is only from old age that I am timid, and they will arrive all right," thought he, "and, at least, we shall be able to get to bed in good time without bother."

Petrushka also saw that there was danger, and he was uneasy, but for nothing in the world would he have allowed this to appear, so he swaggered about and pretended he was not the least afraid, and the lines about

the "snowy whirlwinds" encouraged him mightily, because they exactly expressed what was then going on. As for Nikita, he did not want to start in the least bit, but he had long since grown accustomed to have no will of his own, but to bow to others! So that nothing kept back the travellers.

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CHAPTER V.

VASSILI ANDREÏTCH came up to the sledge, finding it only with difficulty in the darkness, slipped in, and seized the reins. "Go on ahead," he shouted, and Petrushka, kneeling on his "rozvalny," * let go the mare. "Mukhorty," who had been neighing for some time at the mare, started after her, and they were in the street. And yet again they drove past the house with the frozen linen, which they could no longer see, and past the barn, against which the snow had now drifted almost up to the eaves; and then past the osiers with their melancholy rattling and

* "Rozvalny" is the roughest kind of sledge without back or seat. It is merely a couple of runners with a framework of laths or rope to keep them together. It is used to carry hay, chopped wood, or similar loads, on the top of which the driver sits. When empty, he kneels anywhere he can.

rustling, and out on to the billowy sea of snow above and beneath. The gale was so strong that when it took them sideways and the drivers tried to tack against it, it twisted both the sledges and horses round. Petrushka went at a slinging trot in front, and bravely shouted to follow, and "Mukhorty" kept close up. After ten minutes of this Petrushka turned round and said something which neither Vassili nor Nikita could hear for the wind. But they guessed that they had come to the turning. As a matter of fact, Petrushka had turned to the right, and the wind, which had been crosswise, was again meeting him in the face, and on the right, through the snow, could be seen a dark object. It was the bush marking the turn.

"Well, God be with you!"

"Thanks, Petrushka."

"The storm covers the sky with its veil," shouted Petrushka, and disappeared.

"What a poet he is!" said Vassili, and shook the reins.

"Yes, a fine young fellow, a proper peasant," was Nikita's rejoinder.

They drove on. Nikita huddled himself up, with his head between his shoulders, so that his short beard lay along his neck, and sat silent, trying to keep in the warmth he had stored with his tea. Before him he saw the straight lines of the shafts, continually deceiving him with their appearance of a sledge-tracked road, the swaying rump of the pony with its knotted tail blown on one side, and further in front the high collar and swinging head and neck of "Mukhorty." From time to time his eye caught a bush-mark, so that he knew that so far at least they were in the right road, and there was nothing for him to do.

Vassili was driving, leaving it mostly to the pony to find its way. But "Mukhorty,"

although he had had a rest in the village, was not going willingly, and made as if he would leave the track, so that Vassili had several times to guide him.

"There is one bush to the right, there's another, and a third," counted he, "and there is the wood in front," he thought, looking at something black. But it was only a bush. They drove past it, forty or fifty yards further, but there was no fourth road-mark, and no wood.

"The wood must come soon," reflected Vassili, and, excited by wine and tea, he kept shaking up the reins, whilst the good obedient pony went now at an amble, now at a trot, wherever he was driven, although he knew very well that he was being sent in the wrong direction. Ten minutes more, and still no wood!

"We have actually lost our way again," remarked Vassili, stopping the sledge.

Nikita, without a word, got out, and holding his coat, which the storm at one moment kept pressed close to him and at another tore open, began to wander in the snow from side to side. Three times he disappeared, and when he came back he took the reins from Vassili.

"We must go to the right," he ejaculated severely and decidedly, turning the pony's head.

"Very well, to the right about be it then," answered Vassili, slipping his numbed fingers up his sleeves, "though it will probably take us back to Grishkino."

Nikita did not answer him, but addressing the pony, "Now, my friend, make an effort": but the horse, in spite of the shaking of the reins, refused to go out of a walk. The snow was knee-deep in parts, and the sledge answered every movement with a creaking groan.

Nikita picked up the whip and struck the

pony. The good beast, unaccustomed to the lash, sprang forward, and broke into a trot only to relapse through an amble to a walk again. This went on for ten minutes; it was so dark and it was blowing up so hard from sky and earth, that the high collar could not be seen. Suddenly "Mukhorty" stopped dead, evidently scenting some danger ahead. Nikita threw down the reins and leapt out, going before the pony to see what had made him stand, But he had only gone one step beyond his head when his feet slipped and he slithered down into a gully. "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!" said he to himself as he was falling, and striving to regain the perpendicular, but he could not stop himself and only brought up in a mass of snow at the bottom. A drift lying on the edge of the gully, loosened by Nikita's fall, now came down on the top of him and smothered him.

"Ah, you wretches!" said he reproachfully

speaking collectively to the snowdrift and the ravine, as he cleared the snow out of his collar.

"Mikit! Mikit!" shouted Vassili from above, but no answer from Nikita, who, after wiping himself, searched out his whip which he had lost in his fall. Having found it he wanted to clamber out by the way he had come in, but it was impossible, as he always slipped back again, so that he had to creep along the bottom and find some other exit. Six or seven yards further on he managed with difficulty to climb to the top on all fours, and went to the edge of the gully where the sledge ought to have been. He could not see them though, but, as he was going against the wind, he heard the cry of Vassili and the whinny of "Mukhorty" calling to him, before he made them out.

"Coming! I'm coming!" he answered. "What are you laughing at?"

It was only when he got up to the sledge that he could see the horse, and Vassili standing by him looking gigantic in the night.

"Where the devil have we got to? We must drive back, if we only get to Grishkino again," growled Vassili angrily.

"I should be very pleased to be back there, Vassili Andreïtch, but where are we to drive? There is such a ravine there, that if you once fall in you will never get out. It was all I could do to save myself."

"Well, we can't stay here, and must go on somewhere!"

Nikita said nothing, but sat down with his back to the wind in the sledge, and, taking off his boots, cleaned out the snow, and carefully stopped up the holes in them with a wisp of straw from inside.

Vassili held his peace, leaving the initiative to Nikita, who drew on his boots again, then

his gloves, picked up the reins, and sent the pony along the edge of the ravine. But they had not gone a hundred yards when the horse started back. Again the ravine was before them. Nikita once more got out and explored the snow for a long time, reappearing from the opposite direction to that from which he had started.

"Vassili Andreïtch! Are you alive?" he cried.

"Here I am! Well, what now?"

"I can't make out anything; it is too dark; nothing but ravines! We must drive against the wind."

Again they started, again Nikita had to get out, again he fell; and so it went on, till he came panting up to the sledge.

"Well?"

"I am altogether exhausted. And the pony is tired too."

"What is to be done?"

"Wait a bit." And Nikita left him, to return almost directly. "Keep behind me," he said, walking before the pony. Vassili no longer gave any orders, but obediently followed Nikita's instructions.

"This way," shouted Nikita, sharply jumping to the right, and seizing the reins, he brought "Mukhorty" up into a snowdrift. The pony at first started back, and then leapt forward, trying to get through the drift, but he was not strong enough, and sank in up to his collar. "Jump out," cried Nikita to Vassili, who had remained seated, and laying hold of one of the shafts, he lifted the sledge onwards.

"Hard work, my brother," he remarked to "Mukhorty," but there's nothing else for it. You must do your best. *Nu! nu,* a little more!" The pony made one or two struggles, but without succeeding in extricating himself, and then pricking his ears he

laid his muzzle on the snow as if to think it out.

"Come, my boy! this won't do," exhorted Nikita, "another pull!" Nikita laid hold of the shaft on his side, and Vassili did the same on the other. The pony shook his head, but made a sudden effort.

"*Nu! nu!* You won't go under! Don't be afraid!" yelled Nikita.

One spring, another, and a third, and at last the sledge was out of the drift, and "Mukhorty" stood breathing heavily, and shaking himself. Nikita wished to push the sledge further, but Vassili was so out of breath from his exertion, in his two fur coats, that he could not move, but sank into the sledge.

"Let me rest a moment," he begged, loosening the kerchief he had tied round his coat collar.

"All right, lie down, and I will lead the

way," and catching the pony by the head-strap he took him some ten paces down and then ten up, before coming to a halt. The place Nikita had chosen was not in a hollow, where the snow would have accumulated, but at the same time, it was protected from the wind by a rising piece of ground. There were moments when the wind seemed to have dropped slightly behind this eminence, but they did not last long, and as if to make up for the respite, the storm always raged and roared after it with tenfold vigour. Just such an outburst came on as Vassili, having recovered his breath, had slipped out of the sledge and approached Nikita, to consult as to what they should do. Both of them involuntarily crouched down and waited for the fury of the gale to abate before speaking. "Mukhorty" too was obliged to lay back his ears and shake his head. As soon as the violence of the outburst began to abate, Nikita took off his

gloves, tucked them into his girdle, blew into his hands and commenced to unharness the sledge.

"What are you doing?" asked Vassili.

"Unharnessing; what else would you have me do? I have no strength left," answered Nikita apologetically.

"And can't we drive on to somewhere?".

"No, we can't; we should simply finish the horse—look at him!" pointing to the faithful beast standing there with wet and heaving flanks. "We must sleep here," he repeated, as coolly as if he were preparing to sleep in an inn, and went on undoing the various pieces of harness.

"And shan't we be frozen to death?" asked Vassili.

"Who knows? if you are to be frozen you can't help yourself," answered Nikita.

CHAPTER VI.

VASSILI ANDREÏTCH was perfectly warm in his two fur coats, especially after he had helped in the snowdrift, but the cold struck up the small of his back when he grasped the fact that he would have to sleep out. To calm himself, he sat down and took out his cigarettes and matches. Nikita meanwhile had taken out the pony, loosened the belly-bands and girths, turned round the collar, and kept up a running conversation with "Mukhorty" to cheer his spirits. "*Nu!* get out of the shafts, get out! I'll tie you up here and give you some straw: oh! yes, and you shall have your bit taken out," said he, suiting the action to the word, "Have a feed, old boy, and you will feel better."

But "Mukhorty" apparently was not comforted by Nikita's speeches. He was uneasy and kept stamping with one foot and the other, and pressing up against the sledge, with his back to the wind and rubbing his nose on Nikita's sleeve. As if it were only to thank him for the attention of providing him with straw he snatched a wisp out of the sledge, but then deciding that straw was not the business of the hour, he tossed it away, and it was caught up by the wind and scattered over the snow.

"Now I will make a signal," said Nikita, turning the sledge face to the wind, and tying the shafts together with one of the straps, he raised them aloft and bound them to the front. "There! any charitable people who pass will see the shafts, and dig us out," he remarked, for so he had been taught by the old men.

Vassili Andreïtch meanwhile had opened

his overcoat and drawing up the skirts rubbed one lucifer match after another on his steel box, but his hand trembled so that every match as soon as it was lit was blown out by the wind before he could bring it to his cigarette. At length one match fairly caught, lighting up the fur of his coat, his hand with its gold ring and crooked index finger, and the oaten straw in the bottom of the sledge, all smothered in snow; and he lit his cigarette. Once or twice he greedily drew in and swallowed, then expelled the smoke through his moustache, and would have liked to go on, but the lighted end was whisked off by the wind and carried to join the straw on the snow. But even those few whiffs of tobacco had cheered him up.

"If we *must* sleep out, we must," he declared resolutely, and noting the reared-up shafts, he thought he would make the signal more evident and give Nikita a wrinkle.

"Wait a bit, and I'll put up a flag," and taking off the kerchief which he had had round his neck, he stood on tiptoe and tied it firmly on the strap between the shafts. The handkerchief at once waved frantically, then wrapped round a shaft, then unwound itself, and streamed out and cracked in the wind!

"Look how smart!" said Vassili, admiring his work, as he settled back in the sledge.

"It would be warmer for two; supposing we sit both together."

"I will find a place for myself," answered Nikita, "but we must cover the pony, or he will freeze. Give way," as he pulled the sacking from under Vassili, and folding it double he laid it across "Mukhorty," first loosening the breeching and the pad. "You will be warmer like that, you little fool!" he remarked, putting back the heavy pad and breeching over the sacking.

"And you won't want the other cloth.

Give me a little straw too," said Nikita, returning to the sledge after having done with the pony. Taking one and the other from beneath Vassili he went to the back, scooped out a hole for himself, strewed it with straw, rammed his cap over his ears, wrapped his coat well round, and covering himself with the cloth, leaned against the bast backing of the sledge which kept off the wind and the snow.

Vassili shook his head in disapproval at Nikita's methods, since he regularly despised the want of culture and sense of the peasants, and began to make his own arrangements for the night. First he levelled down all the straw, piling it thicker under his side, and tucking his hands in his sleeves settled his head comfortably in a corner sheltered from the storm. He did not feel sleepy. He lay and thought, thinking always of the same subject, the only aim, object, pleasure and

pride of his whole life, namely, how much money he had amassed already, and how much more he could hope for: how much other men he knew possessed, and how they had gained it, and how he in like manner might gain a great deal more too.

"The oak will do for sledge-runners. The small timber can look after itself. There are at least thirty cubic *sajens** of firewood per *desiateen*," he reckoned, counting the wood he had seen in the autumn and which he was now going to buy. "All the same I won't give ten thousand, but eight—forsooth! there is the bare land to be taken into account!.. I can give the surveyor a tip of a hundred roubles, say a hundred and fifty, and he will count me ten *desiateens* of unwooded land. And I shall get the lot for eight thousand roubles. Three thousand at once in his teeth?

* A "sajen" is seven feet, and a "desiateen" is about two acres and a quarter.

No fear of his refusing?" thought he, feeling for his pocket-book in his breast pocket.

"How on earth we lost our way after the turning, God only knows! There must be a wood and a woodman's hut about here. I can't hear any dog. The cursed brutes never bark when they are wanted." He opened his collar and looked and listened, but the only thing he saw in the darkness was "Mukhorty's" head and back with the sacking hanging down, and all he heard was the whistle of the wind, and the clacking of his handkerchief against the shafts, with the snow driving against the bast. He wrapped himself up again. "If we had only known we should have to sleep out. However! we shall get there to-morrow! Only one day lost. In such weather as this the other buyers won't be there either." And he remembered that on the ninth he had to receive the price of his fat rams from the butcher.

"I should have liked to be there myself. If he does not find me, my wife does not know how to receive money. She is very stupid, and has no idea of the right way of doing business," he reflected, recollecting how awkwardly she had received the district police justice who had visited them the day before. "Of course! a woman! Where has she ever seen anything? What a home we had in my father's time! And yet for a villager he was rich. A store of barley, and that was his wealth! And what have *I* done in fifteen years? A general store, two spirit shops, a mill, a threshing floor, two estates rented, and a house and barn under an iron roof!" thought he with pride. "Somewhat different from what it was in my father's house! Who is the big man in our district now? Who but Brekhunoff!

"And why? Because I know what I am about, and take pains, not like the rest, idle,

fools! I don't sleep at night. Storm or no storm I drive out. And so I do my business. Some people seem to think they can make money by fooling. Nay! work hard and tire yourself! They think that it is a question of luck. Look at the Mironoffs, with millions now; and why? they have worked, and God has given. If only God gives me health!" And the thought that he might become just such a millionaire as Mironoff, who started on nothing, so excited Vassili Andreïtch that he felt the want of somebody to talk to. But he had nobody. If they had only got to Goriatchkino he could have talked to the squire and opened his eyes a bit.*

"Phew! how it blows! It is drifting so hard that we shan't be able to get out in the morning," thought he, listening to the bursts of wind which bent back the front of the

* "To put spectacles upon anybody" is a common expression, meaning to open his eyes; teach him something.

sledge and covered the interstices of the bast with snow.

"I ought not to have given in to Nikita. We ought to have gone on, and we should have come out somewhere. If we had returned only to Grishkino we could have slept at Tarass's. And now we have to sit out here. Shall we get any good out of it? Yes! God will give us something for our pains; not like vagabond fools lying in their beds are we! let us have a smoke." So he sat up, took out his cigarette-case, sheltered himself with his coat, and after many attempts, foiled by the wind, succeeded in lighting up. The mere fact of his success delighted him, and though the storm smoked more of the cigarette than he, nevertheless he did get two or three whiffs, and felt more lively. Then he lay back, and began again to think and to dream and shiver. Suddenly something touched and woke him up. Was it "Muk-

horty" pulling the straw from under him, or something moving inside the sledge? At any rate he woke up, and his heart beat so hard and strong that it seemed to shake the sledge. He opened his eyes. Everything looked just the same, but perhaps a little lighter. "It is dawning," thought he, "and will soon be morning."

But he quickly remembered that it was only lighter because it was later in the month. He raised himself and looked first at the horse. "Mukhorty" was there with his back to the wind and quaking all over. The sacking, snowed over, had fallen on one side and the pad also. His drooping head and crest with flowing mane were plainly visible. Nikita was sitting in the same position. The cloth he had covered himself with, and his feet were thickly powdered. "Provided the man does not freeze to death: he is badly clothed. Who is responsible for him? He is

done up with running about; he is not worth much anyway!" Vassili thought of taking the sacking off "Mukhorty" and covering Nikita, but it would have been cold to get up, and to get back, and possibly the pony might take cold.

"What did I bring him for? It is all part of her folly!" thought he, remembering his querulous wife, and threw himself back into his former position. "My old uncle once sat a whole night in the snow, and it did him no harm," he remembered. "And they dug out Sebastian," as another case came to his memory, "but he was dead: frozen as stiff as a carcase. If we had stopped at Grishkino, it would have been all right." And he carefully drew his coat round him, so that none of the warmth of the fur should be lost, from his ears to the soles of his feet, shut his eyes and tried to doze.

But try as he would he could not forget, but on the contrary felt extremely cheerful and lively. So he began to count over his profits again and the money owing to him, and to exult in his own virtues and glory in his position. But all the same the regret, mixed with a nameless fear, of not having stopped at Grishkino would intrude. He kept turning about, tucking himself in, trying to find an easier posture better sheltered from the storm, but he could not satisfy himself. He got up again, stretched his legs, shut his eyes, and lay quiet. But either his feet in the long boots began to feel numbed or the wind had found an opening, and he could not rest long without thinking with vexation how peaceably he would now be sleeping in Tarass's warm cottage.

Once Vassili fancied he heard a distant cock-crow. He was overjoyed and turned down his collar to listen attentively; but he

strained his ears in vain; nothing but the moan of the wind in the shafts, and the snow in the bast withes. Nikita was sitting as he had sat at first, without stirring or answering Vassili, who had called to him twice. "He has no cares! Let him sleep!" thought Vassili, not without a touch of envy, as he watched Nikita's form now deep buried in the snow.

At least twenty times did Vassili rise. It seemed to him there was no end to the night.

"It must be nearly morning now," thought he once. "Let me see what the time is! I shall get cold if I unbutton, but if I know it is nearly morning I shall feel better, and we can harness. In the depth of his heart he knew that it could not yet be morning; but he was growing more and more timid and wished at once to make sure, or to deceive himself. So he cautiously unhooked

his under-coat, and, slipping his hand into his bosom, fumbled after his waistcoat. At last with great effort he dragged up his silver watch with enamelled flowers and tried to see, but without a light it was impossible. Profiting by experience he kept low and choosing a match with a good head, lit it, at the first attempt. Bringing the face of the watch to the light he could not believe his eyes. It was only ten minutes past midnight. The whole night was still before them. "Oh, the long night!" thought Vassili, feeling a cold chill down his back, as he buttoned up again and snuggled into the corner. At last out of the monotonous roar of the storm he clearly heard a new living sound. The sound grew regularly stronger up to perfect clearness, and then as regularly died away. There was no doubt about it, it was a wolf. And that wolf was so close that down wind it was easy to hear the movement of his jaws as he modu-

lated his howl. Vassili put his collar down altogether and listened anxiously. "Mukhorty" also was all attention, pricking his ears, and when the wolf had finished, he changed his feet and gave a warning neigh. After this Vassili could not only not sleep, but could not rest easy. However hard he tried to think about his accounts, his business, his glory, his worth and his riches, terror grew more and more his master, and over every other thought predominating it or crossing it, came the self-reproach of why he had not remained the night at Grishkino.

"That's what comes of buying woods. Thank God there is other business! They say that drunken men freeze to death," he reflected, "and I have been drinking." A prey to his emotions he felt that he was beginning to shiver, not knowing whether it was from cold or from fear. He tried to cover himself and

lie as he was before, but could not. He could not keep still in one place. He felt a longing to be up, to be undertaking something in order to stifle the terror within him, against which he was powerless. Again he took out his cigarettes, but he only had three matches left and they were all bad ones, and went out without burning.

"The devil fly away with you—curse you!" he swore, addressing nobody in particular, crushing and throwing away the cigarette. He was going to crumple up the matchbox, too, but held his hand, and thrust it in his sleeve. Then he jumped out of the sledge, and with his back to the wind began to tighten his girdle.

"What's the good of lying here and waiting for death? Better get on the horse and away," was the thought that suddenly entered his head. "If he is ridden the pony will not tire." Then remembering Nikita: "It won't matter

to him if he does die. Such a life as his is no loss to himself, but I have something to live for."

So, untying the pony, he led it up to the sledge and tried to jump on his back, but fell off. Then he climbed on to the sledge and attempted to mount from there, but it waggled under his weight, and he fell again. A third time he brought up "Mukhorty," and balancing himself with great care on the edge of the sledge, he managed to lie all along on the pony's back. Finally he succeeded in wriggling himself into position, putting the soles of his feet into the hanging breeching-straps for stirrups. The movement communicated to the sledge, waked up Nikita, who raised his head and seemed to say something.

"Listen, you fool! What's the good of perishing thus? None at all!" shouted Vassili, and tucking the skirt of his coat

under his knee, he turned the horse and rode away from the sledge in the direction in which he supposed there was a wood and a woodman.

CHAPTER VII.

NITIKA had sat without stirring from the moment he had thrown the cloth over his head. Like every man who lives in a state of nature, and acquainted with want, he was very patient and could wait for hours, or even days, quietly, without feeling any uneasiness or anxiety. He had heard when his master had called him, but had not answered because he did not want to move. The thought that he might, and in all probability would, die that night had occurred to him when first he had seated himself in the sledge. Although still warm from the tea he had imbibed and from his exertions in the snowdrift, still he

knew that that warmth would not last long, and that he could not continue to keep warm by active movement, because he felt terribly tired—felt himself, in fact, in the condition of a horse who comes to a standstill, and must be fed before it can work any more. Furthermore, one of his feet, the one in the torn boot, was half-frozen, and he could no longer feel his great toe. And his whole body was gradually growing more and more cold.

The thought that he was going to die that night did not strike him as very unpleasant or very terrible: not unpleasant, because his whole life had not been a long holiday, but on the contrary an unbroken bondage of which he was beginning to weary; and not very terrible, because, besides the masters, such as Vassili Andreïtch, whom he had served on earth, he felt that he was in the power of a

Great Master, of Him who had sent him into this life, and knew that in death he would remain under Him, and that He was a just Master.

"Is it a pity to leave all my life, and all I am accustomed to? Well, well, there is nothing for it but to get accustomed to the new life. My sins!" And the thought of them came to him. He remembered his drunkenness, the money he had squandered in drink, the wrongs inflicted on his wife, his swearing, absence from church, non-observance of fasts and all the priest had told him in confessional. "Sins! ah, well! I did not saddle myself with them all I suppose. Such as I am, God made me! So much for my sins! What can I do with them?" Having thus thought over what was before him and settled the business in that manner, he gave himself up to any memories or ideas which

ran through his mind. He remembered the arrival of his wife Martha, the drunkenness of the other peasants and his refusal to drink, the start for the journey, the cottage of Tarass, and the talk about partition of property; then he thought of his son, and of "Mūkhorty" who was probably now warming himself under a blanket, and his master making the sledge creak as he turned about in it. "I can't say I am pleased at his riding away," thought he, "he did not like the prospect of quitting such a life as his—not like mine!" And all these memories and reflections interweaved and mixed themselves in his brain till he fell asleep.

When Vassili, in mounting his horse, had shaken the sledge, the back of it against which Nikita was propped had given way, and the runner-end stuck into his back. He woke up, and whether he liked it or not was

obliged to shift his position. Stretching out his legs with difficulty and shaking the snow off them, he had raised himself and instantly an agonising cold ran over his whole frame. Understanding his case he would have liked Vassili to have left him the sacking, no longer needed for the pony, to cover himself with, and he had called this out. But Vassili had not stopped, but disappeared in the mist of snow. Left to himself Nikita thought for a moment what he had best do. He felt he had not strength to go in search of a habitation; neither could he sit any longer in the old place which was now full of snow. In the sledge he knew he could not keep warm, because he had nothing to put over him and his poor coat and overcoat did not comfort him at all. He was just as cold as if he were in his shirt. He stood up and pondered, and finally, without taking the cloth off his head,

let himself fall in a heap into his master's place in the sledge, curling up into the smallest possible compass, but he could not keep warm. So he lay for five minutes shivering all over, then the shivering fit passed and by degrees he lost consciousness. Was he dying, or merely sleeping? he did not know but felt equally prepared for one or the other. "If it should please God that he should awake still alive in this world, and go on living with the workmen driving other people's cattle, taking other men's flour to the mill, going on sprees, and swearing off, always giving his wages to his wife, and that same cooper, and waiting for his son to grow up—His will be done! And if it should please Him that he should wake in another world, where everything should be new and glorious, as all was new and glorious in his first childhood; the caresses of his mother, the play

with other children, the meadows, the woods and the winter snow-hilling; if a new different life were to begin resembling in nothing the old—His holy will be done!" Nikita was perfectly unconscious now.

CHAPTER VIII.

All this while Vassili, with heels and harness ends, was urging on his horse to where, for some reason or other, he expected to find a wood and a woodman. The snow blinded him, and the wind seemed to be trying to stop him, but he pressed forward, perpetually arranging his coat and tucking it between his person and the cold nail-studded pad on which he was perched. The pony, though with difficulty, obediently trotted wherever he was ridden. In five minutes he rode, as he thought, straight ahead without seeing anything except his horse's ears, and a waste of snow. Then he fancied something dark loomed in front. His heart beat joyfully and

he rode up to it, already making it out to be the walls of a house. But the black spot was in motion and kept changing position. It was no village, but a strip grown over with tall mugworts protruding through the snow, all bent one way and whistling before the blast. And somehow the view of those mugworts bending before the merciless storm made Vassili shudder, and he made haste to ride away, not noticing that in coming to inspect the spot he had entirely changed his original direction, and was now going in a perfectly different one, though still convinced he was riding to where he should find a woodman. The same thing repeated itself, and again he came upon a field of weeds. But here he saw a horse's tracks, evidently recent, and on examination discovered they were his own. He had evidently been riding in a circle, and a small one. "I shall come to grief if I go on like this," thought he, and

in order not to give way to fright he pushed on with redoubled energy, peering into the snowy haze, in which he could see nothing except occasional twinkling and disappearing specks of light. Once he fancied he heard a dog bark, or a wolf howl, but the sound was so feeble and indistinct that he was not certain whether he had really heard it or not, so he stopped to listen. Suddenly a fearful ringing cry burst out close to his ears and trembled and echoed round him. Vassili clutched the pony round the neck, but his neck was trembling too, and the terrible cry was still more awful. For a second or two Vassili could not collect his nerves, or think what had happened. But it was simply this, that "Mukhorty," in order to keep up his spirits, or to call for help, had given a neigh in his clear sonorous voice.

"Phoo! you brute, how you frightened me!" muttered Vassili, but even when he

knew the reason of his terror, he could not quite get over it. "I must think it out, and come to some decision," said he to himself; but all the time he was riding on, without remarking that he now had the wind behind him. His body, when the pony went at a walk, especially where it was exposed and touched the pad, was numb with cold, sore and trembling. He had already forgotten the woodman and wished only to get back to the sledge, so as not to die alone like the mugworts, in this gruesome desert of snow.

Without warning the pony stumbled, pitched into a drift, gave a kick or two, and fell on its side. Vassili slipped off, bringing the breeching round with his foot and also the pad which he had clutched as he fell.

As soon as he was free of Vassili though, "Mukhorty" got on his legs, plunged forward, made a spring or turn, and with another neigh, vanished from sight, dragging

the pad and straps behind him, and leaving Vassili in the drift. He started in pursuit, but the snow was so deep, and his coats so heavy, that after he had gone twenty paces, up to his knees every step, he stopped.

"Woods, fat rams, estates, stores, wine-shops!" thought he. "How can I leave them all? Not a bit of it! It can't be!" And the memory of the mugworts waving in the storm, past which he had twice ridden, came back to him with such a terror that he could not believe in the reality of what had happened to him. Was it not all a dream? And he wanted to wake, but there was no dream and no waking. It was real snow which was flogging his face and smothering him, and it was a real solitude in which he was left alone, like a mugwort, to await an inevitable, speedy, and unheard-of death.

"Mother of God! Nicolas the Wonder-worker, upholder of the Faithful!" he ejacu-

lated, remembering yesterday's prayers, and the image with blackened face and golden cope, and the candles which he had sold for this image, and which had immediately been brought back, and which he had forthwith hidden in the taper-chest,* scarcely consumed at the tips. And now he prayed that same Nicolas the Wonder-worker to save him, promising him masses and tapers. At this point it struck him clearly and forcibly that that face and cope, those tapers, priests and masses, were very important and necessary in church, but that here in the snow they could do him no good, and that there was not, and could not be the slightest connection between those candles and prayers and his present pitiable plight.

* The taper-chest is a great source of revenue. The peasants buy a taper and hand it to the priest, who lights it and places it in front of the image for a moment or two, then extinguishes it, and throws it into the chest, from which it is extracted ten minutes later to be sold again.

"I must not give way, but must start on the tracks of the horse. They will bring me out," was his reflection, and he started forward. But in spite of his resolve to go slowly, he began to run, kept falling, picking himself up, and falling again. The track was already hard to follow where there was less snow. "I am a lost man," thought Vassili, "if I lose this track." But just then he saw a dark object ahead. It was "Mukhorty," and not only "Mukhorty," but the sledge and the shafts. It turned out that Vassili had fallen into that same gully into which they had dropped before with Nikita, and that he had wandered on horseback up to within fifty yards of where he had started from the sledge.

CHAPTER IX.

STRUGGLING up to the sledge Vassili caught hold of it, and stood for some time without stirring, trying to get back his breath. Nikita was not in his old place, but something was lying in the sledge covered with snow, and Vassili guessed it was Nikita. His terror was altogether gone now, and if he feared anything it was that state of terror he had experienced whilst riding, and especially when alone in the drift. At all hazards he must not let himself fall into that state again, and in order to safeguard his mind it was necessary to think of something, to do something. So he commenced by turning his back to the wind and unbuttoning his coat. Then,

as he began to recover a little, he wiped the snow off his boots and gloves, and girded himself afresh, tight and low down, prepared for action, as when he went out from his store to buy grain from the peasants. The first business that occurred to him was to free the pony's legs, which he did, and then led and tied "Mukhorty" to the front of the sledge, and went behind him to put the breeching and pad in their proper places. During this operation he saw something move inside the sledge, and from beneath the snow Nikita raised his head. Evidently with a mighty effort the peasant gained a sitting posture, waved his hand in front of his face with a strange gesture as if chasing flies, and said something which seemed to Vassili as if he were calling him. He left the sacking without arranging it, and came up to Nikita.

"What is the matter with you? What do you say?"

"I am . . . dying; that is what is the matter," answered he in a broken voice. "Look after my son and my wife."

"What is the matter? Are you frozen?"

"I feel my death! Pardon! The love of Christ," murmured Nikita in a tearful voice, continuing all the while to wave his hands, as if keeping off flies.

Vassili Andreïtch stood for half a minute without speaking or moving, then rapidly, with the same decision with which he was won't to strike hands over a good bargain, he stepped back a pace, turned up his cuffs, and with both hands began to dig the snow off Nikita, and out of the sledge. When this was accomplished, he hurriedly undid his girdle, threw open his fur coat, and flung himself upon Nikita, covering him not only with his coat, but with his whole glowing warm body. Arranging the skirts of his coat between Nikita and the back of the sledge,

and grasping him between his own knees, he lay flat, resting his own head on the bast, and now he could no longer hear the movements of the pony or the whistle of the wind, but only Nikita's breathing. Nikita at first lay motionless, then sighed deeply, and moved, evidently feeling warmer.

"There now! And you talking of dying! Lie still and get warm! That's how we——"

But to his huge astonishment Vassili could not get any further in his speech, for the tears crowded into his eyes, and his lower jaw trembled. He left off talking and only gulped down something rising in his throat.

"I have got a regular fright, and am as weak as a baby," thought he to himself; but that weakness, far from being disagreeable, gave him a peculiar pleasure, the like of which he had never felt before.

"That's how we are!" he repeated, experiencing a feeling of curious quiet triumph,

and lying still for a long time, wiping his eyes on the fur of his coat, and tucking under his knee the right side of his coat which the wind kept blowing loose. But he wanted terribly to tell somebody how happy he was.

"Nikita!" said he.

"Niee! Warm!" came the answer from below.

"So, so, brother! I should have been lost and you would have been frozen. I ——"

But here again his jaw trembled, his eyes filled with tears, and he could not go on.

"Well, never mind," he thought, "I know very well myself what I know," and he kept silent. Several times he glanced at the horse, and saw that his back was bare and the sacking was draggling in the snow; he ought to get up and cover him, but he could not make up his mind, at that moment, to leave Nikita, and break in upon the happy condition in which he was revelling. He no

longer felt any fear. He was warm from below from Nikita, and above from his coat, only his hands, which were holding the fur round Nikita, and his feet, which the wind kept uncovering, were beginning to be numbed. But he gave no thought to them, but only how best to restore warmth to the peasant lying beneath him.

"No fear—he won't die!" said he to himself, as proud of having brought the man back as of his buying and selling. At first his imagination was taken up with the storm: he saw the shafts, and the pony under his collar, swimming before his eyes. Then he remembered Nikita stretched there under him. Then confused memories of the holiday festivities, of his wife, of the police justice, of the taper-chest, and again Nikita, now lying under the chest. Next he saw peasants buying and selling, white walls, and the house with the iron roof beneath which again lay

Nikita: then all mixed themselves together one picture with another like the colours of a rainbow, making one white colour, all the different impressions fused into one nothingness, and he fell asleep. For long he slept dreamlessly, but towards dawn again came visions. It seemed that he was standing by the chest of tapers, and the old wife Tikhonova asked him for a five copeck taper for the holiday, and he wished to give her one but he could not take his hands out of his pockets. He wanted to go round the chest but his feet would not move, and his new goloshes had grown on to the stone floor, and he could neither stir them nor take his feet out. Suddenly the chest was no longer a chest but a bed, and Vassili saw himself lying on his face on the chest, or on his bed in his own house. There he lay and could not get up, though he had to get up because Ivan Matveïtch the justice was coming to see him, and he had to

go with Ivan either to buy a wood or else to adjust Mukhorty's harness. And he asked his wife, "Hasn't he come yet?" "No, he had not," she replied. Then he heard some one drive up to the front door. It must be he. No, he drives past, "Nicolaevna, Nicolaevna! has he not come *yet?*" Not yet. And he lay on the bed and waited and could not rise, and the waiting was painful and yet pleasant. In a moment his joy was full, he whom he was expecting had come, but it was not Ivan Matveïtch the justice, but somebody else, and yet it was the one he was waiting for. He came and called to him, and he who called was the same who had commanded him to lie upon Nikita. And Vassili Andreïtch was glad that this visitor had called him.

"I am coming," he cried joyfully, and his cry woke him.

He woke, but not altogether the same as he had fallen asleep. He strove to rise, and

could not; to move his arm, he could not, nor his leg. He tried to turn his head, and could not even do that. It astonished him, but did not vex him in the slightest. He knew that this was death, and neither did that vex him. He remembered that Nikita was lying under him, warmed and alive, and it seemed that he was Nikita, and Nikita was he, and that his life was in Nikita, and not in himself. He strained his ears and heard Nikita breathing.

"Nikita is living, so that I am also alive," said he triumphantly to himself. And something quite new, such as he had never known before in his life, came over him.

He remembered his money, his store, his house, his buying and his sales, and the Mironoff millions, and could not understand why the man they called Vassili Andreïtch Brekhunoff had worried over what he had worried over. "You see! he did not know what he was about," thought he, referring to Brek-

hunoff. "He did not know as I now know. For I know now without a mistake—yes, *I know now.*" And again he heard that voice calling. "I come, I come!" he answered joyfully, with his whole being. And he felt that he was free, and nothing further held him back. And these were the last things that Vassili Andreïtch saw, heard, and felt in this world.

Around the storm still raged, and the snow whirlwinds covered the coat of the dead Vassili, the shivering head of "Mukhorty," and sledge with Nikita lying warm in the bottom of it under his dead master.

CHAPTER X.

TOWARDS morning Nikita woke. He was roused by the cold again beginning to creep along his spine. He had dreamt that he was driving back from the mill with his master's grain, and at Liapin's, opposite the bridge, he had taken down a load. He saw himself lifting the sack and arranging it on his back, but it was very extraordinary! the sack would not slip off, but stuck to his back, and he could neither lift it off, or slip from under it. It was crushing his loins. And it was cold! He must get away from it somehow.

"Enough!" he cried to the man who had put the load on his back. "Take off the sack." But the load pressed more heavily, and

with a more cruel cold upon him, and then something struck him, and he awoke altogether and remembered it all. The cold sack was the dead frozen master lying upon him. And the blow that woke him was "Mukhorty" striking the slope with his hoofs twice.

"Andreïtch, ah! Andreïtch," he called softly having a presentiment of the truth. But Andreïtch did not answer, and his body and legs were stiff and cold and heavy as iron bars.

"'He must be dead! Powers of Heaven!" thought Nikita.

He turned his head, brushed away the snow with his hand and opened his eyes. It was light. The wind was still whistling through the shafts, and the snow was still driving, but with this difference that it no longer sounded against the bast but was gently smothering the sledge and the pony, mounting higher and higher noiselessly and he could no longer

hear the horse breathing. "He must be frozen too," he murmured, and of a truth the hoof strokes against the sledge which had roused Nikita were the last dying efforts of "Mukhorty" already stiffening, to keep on his legs.

"O God, our Father! thou art calling me too," said Nikita to himself, "Thy will be done, but it is hard! If two are already dead why should one escape? the sooner the better!" And he again drew in his hand, closed his eyes and lost consciousness, convinced that this time he was dying for certain.

Next day at dinner-time the peasants with wooden shovels dug out Vassili Andreïtch and Nikita, only seventy yards off the road and half a verst from the village.

The snow had covered the sledge, but the shafts and the handkerchief were visible. "Mukhorty," up to his chest in the snow with the breeching and sacking trailing off

his back, stood there all white with his head stretched out, the Adam's apple in his throat hard as a stone. His nostrils were covered with icicles, his eyes were frosted over with frozen tears. In one night he had grown so lean that he was nothing but mere skin and bone.

Vassili was like a frozen piece of butcher's meat, and they took him off Nikita with his arms and legs extended rigidly. His prominent hawk eyes were frozen and his mouth was full of snow beneath his clipped moustache. Nikita was alive although frozen through. When they woke him he believed that he was already dead, and that what they were doing with him was happening in the other world. And when he heard the shouts of the peasants digging him out and taking the dead body of Vassili off him, his first impression was one of wonder that peasants should also shout in the other world. But

when he understood that he was still in this world he was rather vexed than pleased, especially when he discovered that all his toes were frozen.

He lay for two months in hospital. They took off three of his toes, but the rest recovered so that he was able to go on working, and continued to live for twenty years: first with the workmen, and then, through old age, in an almshouse. He only died this year, as he wished to, with the holy sacraments, and a lighted taper in his hand. Before his death he asked pardon of his wife and forgave her the cooper. He also made his peace with his son and his grandchildren, and died, honestly rejoicing in that he thus relieved his son and daughter-in-law from the burden of his maintenance, and that he passed naturally out of a life of which he was weary into that life which every year and every hour had grown more real and more attractive to him. Is he better or

worse off there where he has awaked after this actual death? Has he been disenchanted? or has he found there all that he yearned for? We shall all of us know soon.

COUNT LEO TOLSTOI.

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